

Sociology - Slovenia

Adam, Frane; Makarovič, Matej

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Frane Adam and Matej Makarovič

Sociology – Slovenia

Discussant: Franc Mali

Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of sociology in Slovenia, including both the history of its development and its present condition. A number of authors have made contributions, both general and more narrowly focused, that can be helpful in this regard. Jogan (1994; 1995a), Vičič (1989), and Kerševan (1995), as well as, more recently, Adam and Makarovič (2001) have provided general overviews. Others have focused on specific aspects of sociological practice in Slovenia, such as the collection of bibliometric and other data on the social sciences (Mali, 1999), the history of qualitative research (Adam et al., 1999), and the reception of particular theoretical paradigms, such as modern systems theory (Bernik and Rončević, 2001) or classics like Schutz (Jogan, 1995b). Several authors, including Bojan Čas (1996), have also described the prewar history of Slovene sociology.

This overview is not an end in itself. It also strives to make a contribution to critical intradisciplinary self-reflection on the strengths, weaknesses, potential, and future perspectives of Slovene sociology.

1. Analysis of the pre-1989 situation

The first Slovene sociological publications appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century (Janez Evangelist Krek, Aleš Ušeničnik, Andrej Gosar, Josip Jeraj, France Veber), and sociology first became a university course for students of philosophy in 1927–28 and for students of pedagogy in 1935–36. It is no surprise that, at this time (and in this part of Europe), sociology was not considered an autonomous discipline, but rather a source of additional knowledge and new insight that could supplement the curricula of other, more established disciplines. Sociology was taught merely on an informative level, with only the rudiments of empirical research. It is interesting to note that the first presentations of sociological concepts were written by Roman Catholic theologians; only later were some sociological terms included in the discussions and publications of Marxist circles. To put it differently, the sociology that appeared and was recognized in the prewar period (before 1941) was primarily sociology in its pre-empirical stage of development.

Sociology virtually disappeared from Slovene society during the first decade of Yugoslavia's communist regime, which dismissed it as "a bourgeois science" (Jogan, 1995: 51–53). In the mid-1950s, however, sociological discussion reappeared, though of course from a "historical materialist" perspective (Kerševan, 1995: 42). Sociological research was institutionalized in Slovenia with the establishment in 1959 of the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, which became the Institute of Sociology in 1981. In 1991, it merged with the Research Institute of the Faculty of Sociology, Political Science, and Journalism to become the Institute of Social Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences (Dekleva, 1995). At the University of Ljubljana, the graduate study of sociology was initiated in 1960 at the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Arts, and later, in 1966, it began as well at the Faculty of Sociology, Political Sciences, and Journalism, now called the Faculty of Social Sciences (Jogan, 1995: 54–55). In 1993, the graduate study of sociology was also introduced at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Maribor. A national sociological association was established in 1965.

In a relatively short time, at least a few Slovene sociologists began to collaborate on some international research projects: on industrial democracy in the 1960s (Veljko Rus, Vladimir Arzenssek, Janez Jerovsek); in the field of spatial and urban sociology in the 1960s and 1970s (Zdravko Mlinar); and, in the 1980s, on the family in Europe (led by Katja Boh), on the meaning of work (Vojko Antončič), and on the quality of life and welfare (Ivan Svetlik and Veljko Rus), to mention the most notable examples (Jogan, 1995: 54).

Despite the prevailing "historical materialist" orientation of the institutions, the development of sociological practice inevitably led to inconsistencies with the official Marxist ideology, at times resulting in confrontations with the communist regime. In the 1970s, for instance, four professors in what is now the Faculty of Social Sciences (one phenomenologically-oriented philosopher and three professors from the sociology department) were suspended because of their views and especially because of their "ideologically inappropriate" influence on students. But as it is well known, this ideological confrontation (and the subsequent discreditation) involved not only communist party functionaries. Academics – sociologists – also played important, morally problematic roles here. The suspended social scientists were accused of using methods borrowed from the bourgeois social sciences and of presenting (socialist) social reality in a "biased" way.

As the regime's ideological control grew weaker during the 1980s, however, new sociological discussions became possible that, using concepts such as civil society, modernization, and functional differentiation, provided a strong theoretical basis for criticism not only of deformations *within* the system, but also of the communist system as a whole (Bernik and Rončević, 2001). The collapse of the communist system and the ability to analyze it freely were thus interdependent.

Any discussion and summary of the development of the sociological discipline during the communist period must take into account differing points of views, various kinds of achievements, and positives as well as negatives. It is a very ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, it is true that sociological research was either subjected to strict ideological control (accompanied by temporary repressive measures) or subtly exploited by the regime, not only in the 1950s, but also later, in the period 1973–1984. On the other hand, new institutions in research and teaching emerged, and, what is especially important, an infrastructure for empirical research was established. By the end of the 1980s, some fields of research, such as industrial sociology and urban studies (the sociology of space), were well developed, and not only in Slovenian or Yugoslav terms; these fields could be favorably compared with their international counterparts. To a lesser extent, this is true also for mobility and stratification research; public opinion research, meanwhile, already had some practical experience and results.

2. Redefinition of the discipline since 1990

As already noted, the strength of various theoretical traditions and the influence of recent theoretical developments on Slovene sociology were connected to the loosening of the former regime's ideological control during the 1980s and its ultimate collapse in 1990. The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s were thus marked by what may be called "a theoretical turning point" (Bernik and Rončević, 2001) from the domination of a single theoretical paradigm that observed everything through (dogmatic or simplified) Marxist eyes to a multi-paradigmatic situation, which, however, has naturally shown a greater enthusiasm for some of the recently discussed paradigms than for others. It should also be noted that theories were often discussed from the perspective of their practical relevance for a better understanding of current societal problems.

The collapse of the communist system did not in itself lead to major changes in research and teaching personnel. But some people who had been marginalized in the old regime were now given opportunities for faster professional promotion or a teaching career. Those who had acted as communist party ideologues, inhibiting free and open discussion and accusing colleagues of being proponents of bourgeois science, soon underwent a conversion to feminist, ecologically-oriented,

or social democratic views or portrayed themselves simply as “neutral” observers of society. Here it is worth mentioning that only a minority of academic sociologists had represented dogmatic Marxist views or had been directly politically active from high positions in the *nomenklatura*. There is only one known case in which an important person was (informally) forced to leave the faculty after the turn to democracy in 1990. For the most part, teaching and research institutions (namely, in Ljubljana, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Sociology Department of the Faculty of Arts and their respective research institutes) kept their general structures, and there were no major changes to speak of. Over the past decade, however, several new public and private institutions in academic research and higher education have been established (for example, the Sociology Department of the Faculty of Education at the University of Maribor), while others are in the developmental stage (notably, the Faculty of Humanities in Koper).

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, greater cooperation became possible between Slovenia’s sociological institutions and sociologists of Slovene origin living abroad. The most prominent example is that of Thomas Luckmann, co-author of the well-known book *The Social Construction of Reality*, who received an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Ljubljana and was a guest professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The trend toward autonomy, professionalization, specialization, and internationalization, the rudiments of which had existed earlier (especially in the 1980s), continued to develop after 1990. Sociology in Slovenia was thus transformed into a modern social science discipline (with all the deficiencies and contradictions this entails). New topics arose in the area of transition studies. Also, the curricula went through some changes, and new subjects and even whole new programs were introduced (cultural studies, for instance).

As far as sociology’s appeal to students is concerned, figures show that, over the last decade, the number of graduate and post-graduate students has been steadily increasing. On the negative side, however, some studies of the performance of first-year students indicate that, in comparison to previous years, the students who choose to study sociology are not as strong as they once were (the better students tend to opt for such political science disciplines as international relations). The latest statistics from the Faculty of Social Sciences (October 2001) gives the following picture: At the Department of Sociology there are 576 students (199 of them are new students who first enrolled in the current academic year). Approximately the same number of students are at the Faculty of Arts, but they combine sociology or the sociology of culture with other humanistic subjects taught at the faculty, while at Maribor there are about 100 students, who also combine sociology with other subjects.

Also, the number of post-graduate students has been growing in recent years. At present, there are 141 students, mainly part-time, registered at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

3. Core theoretical and methodological orientations

One can hardly speak of any major revival of Slovene mainstream pre-war sociology after the collapse of the communist regime. Instead, there have been only a few relatively minor references – to the work of Andrej Gosar, for example – that seemed relevant for the recent discussions of social market capitalism and (neo-)corporatism. Much more attention has been devoted to the classics of sociology and recent developments in Western sociology.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a degree of increased interest in the study and translation of sociological classics. Where there were once primarily Marxist discussions, now there were a variety of perspectives, with discussions about, for instance, Schütz’s phenomenology, Weber’s concepts of rationality and legitimacy (which Ivan Bernik applied to the communist regime), Parsons’ theories of socialization (Vesna Godina) and modernization (Frane Adam), and Durkheim’s contributions to the study of deviance and law (Sergej Flere). Recent interpretations of classical theories were usually considered in these discussions, which, for example, echoed the

neo-functionalist reinterpretations of Parsons in the 1980s and (to a lesser extent) showed a renewed appreciation for Georg Simmel.

More recent sociological theories, however, have received greater attention. One may first mention the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann. Discussions of this theory have examined its philosophical and theoretical foundations (Frane Adam, Tine Hribar), its significance for the understanding of the role of science (Mali, 1994), and its emphasis on the differentiation of society into autonomous functional sub-systems, which has been understood as a useful tool for analyzing both the failure of communism and the problems of post-communist modernization (Ivan Bernik and Matej Makarovič). For a discussion of this classification, see Bernik and Rončević, 2001.

Another German sociologist receiving significant attention in Slovenia is Jürgen Habermas, who has been discussed both on the level of general concepts and in the context of the meaning of the public sphere (Škerlep, 1997).

One may also mention, among other concerns, an interest in postmodernism as articulated in the intersection between sociology and cultural studies (Debeljak, 1998). New approaches include micro-perspectives of everyday life, the role of emotions, the examination of subcultures, and feminist views.

Quantitative and qualitative methods

Nevertheless, there is still a substantial gap, hardly unique to Slovene sociology, between theory and empirical research. It seems we are still concerned, on the one hand, with descriptive empiricism (or, as Luckmann once said, "social bookkeeping") and, on the other, with abstract theorizing and "moralizing" without any significant empirical evidence.

Most empirical research is characterized by the clear domination of quantitative approaches¹ using the survey method. This can best be illustrated by the series of public opinion surveys that the Center for the Research of Public Opinion (now the Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research Center) conducted as the Slovene Public Opinion (SPO) project.² The surveys, led by Niko Toš, have been carried out continuously since 1968 and, taken together, use more than 4,200 different variables, not counting the repetition of several variables in more than one survey (Toš and Malnar, 1995: 63). Although many of the indicators measured by these surveys were later replaced by newer ones, very interesting comparisons between various periods have still been possible. These surveys have thus been able to provide extremely rich data on Slovene society. But it would seem that these data have not been systematically interpreted in the light of more general (theoretically articulated) approaches. On the other hand, they are used much too extensively and often as the sole source of empirical evidence.

Over the past twenty-five years, there have been a number of successful applications of qualitative methods worth mentioning (Adam et. al., 1999). Even so, these methods have always remained marginal and have not been accorded their deserved place in the education process. It is interesting and at the same time problematic that the majority of research (roughly three-quarters) in which qualitative research techniques were employed focused on adolescents and youth subcultures. This is certainly the case for research conducted in the 1990s. One might expect that the thematic range would be greater, with research of this sort also focusing on phenomena like local elites, civil initiatives, processes of decision-making in local communities, new companies, NGOs, political parties, etc. Yet this has not occurred, although a democratic system might be expected to generate more incentives for research in these directions.

Sociologists also make little use of case studies, to say nothing of more in-depth phenomenological studies. Regarding the methods applied, we can observe a predominant use of unstructured and semi-structured interviews, while employment of the biographical method is only just beginning. The application of long-term fieldwork and participant observation is still rare; the use of computer-based programs to analyze qualitative data, too, is only in its early stages.

4. Thematic orientation and funding

Societal problems related to the post-communist transition and modernization are clearly reflected in sociological research to quite a great extent, especially if transition is understood broadly as having at least some impact on almost all major aspects of society. Looking at such problems in the 1990s from the perspective of Slovene sociology, one may distinguish several issues that have, to a greater or lesser degree, become the major areas of sociological research:

1. The issue of political *democratization* – sociological studies in this field have mostly dealt with such elements as civil society (the public sphere), its values and attitudes (political culture), and the characteristics and role of the elite.
2. Research on potentials and indicators related to *developmental issues* and transformation (transition) processes, including the structure and effects of management, industrial relations, education, privatization, human resources, and so on.
3. Research related to various aspects of cultural *identity*, particularly on the national, ethnic, regional, and local levels, with regard to the European or global context.
4. Other studies dealing with some particular aspects of *social structure*, welfare, and social policy, such as the impact of the market economy on social cohesion or the quality of life; the effects of unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, and the societal position of various categories, such as young people, women, the elderly, and so on.

On point 1: Sociologists, political scientists and legal experts have conducted studies on democratization in virtual isolation from each other. Unlike other specialists, sociologists have been much less interested in the institutional aspects of democratization. Although there was in the late 1980s some interest in the theoretical concepts relating to the notion of civil society, more empirical issues dominated sociology in the 1990s. These have included, in particular, quantitative research on the public sphere using opinion polls, as we have noted, as well as studies of elites.

Many research questions involving opinion polls, which have provided a valuable empirical basis for a number of relevant discussions, have concerned values and attitudes toward democracy (such as the problem of its instrumentalist acceptance, discussed by Bernik et al. 1996, and public confidence in institutions), as well as other issues such as religion, the environment, work, family, inequality, etc. The public perception of democratization has also been studied in a comparative perspective, using, for example, data from the survey *The Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe*. Nevertheless, the number of published discussions of democratization hardly reflects the enormous amount of data that has been collected.

Splichal (1999) has also discussed public opinion in a more theoretical way. Public attitudes and perceptions are profoundly related to the topic of mass communication, which has also been a subject of study, including research on the mass media's role in post-communist democratization from a comparative, international perspective. Recently, greater attention has been devoted to the question of the freedom of the mass media in the context of state regulations and a market economy.³

Research on public attitudes has been complemented by two surveys on leadership, both international in scope. One of these surveys was oriented toward the characteristics and especially the values of leaders on the local level, while the other studied elites on the national level: their characteristics, attitudes, origins, interdependencies, etc. The latter study, which provided evidence for quite a high level of elite reproduction, provoked some heated polemics (for some contributions on this topic, see Kramberger, 2000).

On point 2: Sociological studies have approached developmental issues from several angles. Sociologists have used a number of indicators to measure various aspects of development, including socio-cultural factors and other theoretically-based models (Adam et al., 2001).

Emphasis has been placed on studying the regulation and organization of new forms, from extensive studies of privatization in social services and of industrial relations (Stanojević, 2001) to discussions of neo-corporatist arrangements, the potential of societal self-regulation, and the developmental role of the state, with an emphasis on small-state specifics (Adam and Tomc,

1994). Some attention has also been given to the regulation of relations between scientific institutions (universities and institutes), the economy, and the state (Mali, 2000).⁴

On point 3: Various aspects of identity have also been examined. Mlinar and his colleagues, for example, emphasized the relations between spatially-based identities, in particular, and current globalization processes (Mlinar, 1992; Mlinar, 1995). Ethnic identity and minorities have also been extensively addressed (Miran Komac, Boris Jesih, Mitja Žagar). Particular stress has been placed on studies of Slovene minorities outside of Slovenia, especially those living in Austria and Italy, and the Slovene diaspora abroad. For the most part, research in these areas has been carried out at the Institute of Ethnic Studies in Ljubljana and the European Center for Ethnic, Regional, and Sociological Studies at the University of Maribor. There have also been some theoretically-based studies of nationalism issues and of the emergence of a new nation-state in the era of globalization (Rizman, 1993).

Given its crucial importance for Slovene society, the question of European integration, which involves complex identity issues related to autonomy and globalization, has received surprisingly little sociological attention, especially compared to discussions of the topic by economists and, to a lesser extent, political scientists. There are, however some significant exceptions, and sociological interest in the topic appears to be increasing.

On point 4: Finally, one should mention studies concerned with certain other aspects of the social structure. There are practically no recent extensive and systematic studies of stratification in general, though the problem has been discussed in relation to several other topics. The only partial exception is a collection of studies edited by Kramberger (2000). Such neglect seems quite strange, given the significant changes in the stratificational structure caused by the market economy, as well as the tradition of stratification and social mobility studies in post-war Slovene sociology.

Somewhat greater attention has been paid to studies of various specific categories within the social structure, such as youth (Mirjana Ule, Tanja Renner), the elderly (Ivan Svetlik), and women (Vlasta Jalušič, Silva Mežnarič and Ule 1993; Renner 1993). Issues of social cohesion versus the problems of exclusion (Martina Trbanc) and poverty (Mojca Novak) have also been addressed, especially in the context of marketization.

Attention has also been paid to the standard of living, which Ivan Svetlik and his colleagues studied extensively in the international *Social Structure and the Level of Living Survey*. Recent research on the standard of living has made use of several new methods, such as event history analysis (Mandič, 2000).

It may be argued that most sociological research in Slovenia, especially at the macro level, has been at least partially and indirectly related to various issues of transition. However, this does not mean, that these issues – or other major societal problems – have been fully covered. Over the past decade, in fact, there has been a serious lack of studies dealing with stratification and social mobility. Despite some researchers' significant interest in particular social categories, virtually no attention has been devoted to certain new social categories, such as entrepreneurs or, on the other hand, the "losers" in the transition. In the area of democratization, interest in the structure and (political) functions of the public sphere or civil society has hardly gone beyond the study of public opinion.

The thematic orientation of Slovene sociologists is at least partially reflected in institutional structures. This may be clearly seen, for instance, in the high level of internal differentiation into research centers and groups at the Institute for Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana. Perhaps the strongest of these, in terms of personnel and financial resources, are the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Center; the Center for Organizations and Human Resources, which deals particularly with the sociology of organizations, labor markets, and industrial relations; and the Center for Spatial Sociology, which studies primarily spatial divisions, relations, and identities in the context of globalization. To some extent, these centers may also reflect certain thematic priorities in Slovene sociology.

Theoretical interests and orientations in academic institutions are not directly related to issues of funding, though obviously the relationship between funding and choice of topic is much more direct in applied research. The funding of sociology depends almost exclusively on public sources, mostly from governmental bodies on the national and, to a lesser extent, local and municipal levels. The importance of international funds (especially from European Union institutions) is also increasing. Private funding of sociology remains insignificant. A notable exception is the Soros Foundation, though in the recent years this foundation has severely cut back its funding of Slovene social scientists.

The lack of private funding is also due to the relatively weak cooperation of Slovene academic institutions, in general, with the business sector, as well as with public bodies, state agencies, and NGOs. This may be particularly true for sociology, which decision-makers may quite often perceive as too exclusively “academic” and insufficiently “practical” or applicable.

5. Public space and academic debates

There is a relative lack of open sociological discussion in Slovenia, despite the long existence of institutions that should be the proper place for academic debates, such as academic journals and the Slovene Sociological Association, established in 1965. In 1983, a specifically sociological journal, *Družboslovne razprave* (Journal of Social Sciences) was added to the collection of more general Slovene social science journals, such as *Teorija in praksa* (Theory and Practice) and *Anthropos*. Sociological articles have also been published in other academic journals, such as *Javnost* (The Public), *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* (Journal for the Critique of Science), and such magazines as *Nova revija*, *Ampak*, etc. *The Public/Javnost* is listed by the Social Science Citation Index, while *Družboslovne razprave* and *Teorija in praksa* are indexed by the Sociological Abstracts database.

Researchers can also make use of various databases in Slovenia. The Slovene Social Science Archive at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana holds the most exhaustive collection of databases, compiled from a great variety of social surveys in Slovenia as well as international surveys that enable valuable comparisons, particularly from the last decade but also from earlier years. General information about the collection of databases is accessible on the Internet.

Despite what might seem like numerous institutional opportunities for discussion, the only significant debate within sociological circles in recent years (which also attracted the attention of the mass media and the general public) was about the empirical studies of Slovene elites mentioned above. The lack of elite circulation in Slovenia was interpreted either as a sign of societal stability and the proper adaptation of “old” elites or as a deficiency in the democratic processes of elite circulation (see also Kramberger, 2000). However, for the most part, this debate did not take place in academic journals, but in publications intended for a broader intellectual public – which may also be an indication of the state of public debate *within* Slovene sociology.

Along with a lack of public discussion among sociologists, there are other problems with the public role of sociologists. Sociologists are too often exploited and (ab)used in ideological confrontations (“cultural struggle”) between political factions. The vast majority of sociologists who take part in such public disputes hold worldviews that reflect a single political faction (which considers itself “leftist-liberal” and mostly overlaps with the ruling political parties), so actions by politicians of this faction may be legitimized by being implicitly perceived as based on scientific arguments.

A typical example concerns the “proper” public role of the Roman Catholic Church. Sociologists writing on this topic⁵ share very similar worldviews, and it is sometimes hard, especially in public debates, to distinguish between their scientific contribution and their value judgments. There are also other examples, in which some sociologists present political stances, for example skepticism toward or opposition to Euro-Atlantic integration, in a way that gives the impression that personal opinions are sociological facts. Such cases may produce an unjustified

public image of Slovene sociology and sociologists as being incapable of the necessary degree of value-neutral, detached judgments.

These problems could be at least partially addressed by the development of a more open and tolerant climate for discussion within the sociological community. Unfortunately, this community is characterized by a certain reluctance to enter into such discussions (which to some extent may be related to the general atmosphere in Slovene media, as well as in Slovene public and political life). The same holds true for the Slovene Sociological Association. Unfortunately, its activities have recently decreased in number and are mostly limited to annual meetings.⁶

Needless to say, such a lack of discussion also contributes to fragmentation when dealing with various issues, a relative dispersion of the scientific community, and a lack of productive teamwork.

6. Views on further development

As mentioned above, Slovene sociologists have established many international contacts and began a certain amount of cooperation with Western social scientists in international research projects as early as the 1960s. They have been able to use these contacts in the international scientific community to develop extensive cooperation in international research projects and publications, as well as to avail themselves of study and teaching opportunities at foreign universities. However, given the relatively small size of Slovenia's societal and scientific network, even greater openness to the international scientific community is needed (especially in regard to publication in journals indexed in SSCI and to collaboration in common European projects like the Framework Programme 5 and 6).

Slovene sociology is not confronted with any serious "brain-drain" problems, since even those who study abroad are very likely to return.

To summarize what has been said about the achievements and current problems of Slovenian sociology, it might be helpful to apply an elementary version of SWOT analysis. Looking at four dimensions – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats – we can establish a basis for anticipating future trends.

Strengths

Sociology in Slovenia is a well-organized, institutionalized, and, to some extent, diversified discipline with a strong research orientation. It is also relatively well-funded, has a sophisticated information infrastructure, and is in many ways better off than all other social science disciplines. Compared, for example, with the situation of sociology in Greece (which has approximately the same GDP as Slovenia), where there are 77 academic researchers and teachers⁷, the situation in Slovenia, which has nearly the same number of academic staff but only one-fifth the population of Greece, is, at least quantitatively, far more advanced.

Weaknesses

Research activity is often fragmented; very little attention is given to open discussion and the exchange of ideas. There is some reluctance to deal with more "delicate" topics and to re-examine the validity of the data sources used in one's own or another's research projects. Teamwork, a focus on strategic issues, and more complex methodological approaches (triangulation) are rather rare. These deficiencies may seriously jeopardize the quality of the sociological endeavor.

Opportunities

A new impetus for renewing the discipline and improving the quality of research is offered by internationalization and close cooperation (but also competition) among individual sociologists and research groups from different countries. Comparative, cross-cultural projects with a more complex methodology have become more viable.

Threats

Without teamwork and interdisciplinary links, it will be quite difficult to avoid a marginal position in the process of internationalization. The further erosion of theoretical (self-)reflection can lead to the establishment of a pragmatic “social engineering” approach and the neglect of the greater public interest.

Within a small social system and a small scientific community, certain phenomena of “inbreeding” – such as clientism, nepotism, and old-boys’ networks – are likely to occur. The best mechanisms for avoiding such deleterious practices are an openness toward international influences and an acceptance of more demanding and unbiased criteria of scientific evaluation and promotion.

Concluding remarks

Proceeding from this weighing of the various parameters that determine the endogenous dynamics and the social context of sociology, various scenarios appear possible. The process of unreflected differentiation and specialization, which leads to fragmentation on the institutional as well as on the epistemic level, is becoming more and more counterproductive. In an increasingly interconnected (networked) world and in a paradoxical and risky society, it is probably more important to give an approximate (but empirically- and theoretically-grounded) answer to a complex question, rather than a precise answer to a partial question.

What is the meaning and mission of sociological theorizing and research in the broader social context? In our view, there are two main contributions: first, to a more rational (self-)reflection of society and, second, to the concrete resolution of specific social problems. In this sense, the separation of so-called critical theory from so-called scientific approach is unproductive. What can sociology do and what can it not do? It might be said that sociology is not able to generate solutions in the form of “pure” prescriptions and “categorical imperatives”. Its role and expertise potential are more modest. It can produce hypothetical solutions in the form of scenarios, multiple options, and cost-benefit or SWOT analyzes. It can be very helpful in indicating and evaluating the side-effects and potential risks of certain decisions and policies. To perform its function, sociology must become a more integrative discipline, open also to new interdisciplinary (and even transdisciplinary) cooperation. Based on our assessment of the situation in Slovenia, the state of the discipline is still far from “optimal”. Nevertheless, this report could serve as a good opportunity to reconsider the state of the art of the discipline within the national and international contexts.

¹ Besides possessing good facilities for conducting social surveys, the Faculty of Social Sciences has a very competent staff with strong backgrounds in mathematics who deal with statistics, methodology, and informatics. Recently they have been working with sophisticated methods of network analysis. It seems, however, that they are somewhat isolated from core sociological research activities.

² There are also several private research institutions that conduct public opinion polls and market research.

³ This may be closely related to the dangers of concentrated ownership of the mass media, which jeopardizes media pluralism.

⁴ Sociological research on developmental potentials has also included studies of human resources. Both the accessibility and the quality (Kump, 1994) of higher education have been evaluated, and its relationship to the labor market has been discussed (Ivančič, 2000).

⁵ The most relevant authors in the field are Zdenko Roter, Kerševan (1993), Flere (2001), Smrke (1999) and Sreco Dragoš.

⁶ Last year’s meeting of the Slovene Sociological Association provides an interesting illustration of the lack of open discussion. In one group, it was argued that sociology should be purely “scientific” in the strictest sense of the word, while a session in a different room concluded that that sort of thinking was illusory. Both groups considered their views virtually self-evident, but there was no opportunity for them to confront each another on the issue.

- ⁷ Lambiri-Dimaki (2001): "The Status of Sociology in Greece", in: Genov, Nikolai and Becker, Ulrike, (eds.) (2001): *Social Sciences in South-Eastern Europe*, Paris; Bonn, International Social Science Council; Informations Zentrum Sozialwissenschaften, 91-111.

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